

The Builder.

No. CXLIX.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1845.



THE announcement of the proposed revision of the Buildings Act, has brought us a flood of letters complaining of its operation. With some trifling exceptions, however, the cases set forth relate to the administration of it rather than to the Act itself, and several of the letters apply wholly to the proceedings of one or two district surveyors only.

We are never willing to find fault, and would at any time step a little way out of the path of strict duty, to avoid hurting the feelings of a professional brother. Our object in alluding to one or two instances of unwise conduct on the part of district surveyors, at the present moment, is to induce those who are deputed to see the Act carried out, to "do their spitting gently," and not by an avaricious grasping after fees, to increase still further the feeling of disapprobation which has been engendered. If they would consider for a moment, as we well know a large number of the body do, that they hold their office for the protection of the public, and not for their own personal advantage, their course of action would often be different from what it is. The Act is not put into an officer's hands simply, that he may find occasions to demand a fee, but that he may see its provisions for the general good (often opposed to private interests), honestly carried out; provision is made in it to pay him fairly for all he does, but any thing beyond this he ought not to look for; and what is more, *must* not. In return to the letters before us.

The first we take up reproaches us in strong terms, for omitting to draw attention to an information laid by Mr. C. R. Badger against Mr. Barnes, for having "made certain additions to projections" from a house situate on a plot of back-ground in the Lewisham-road, contrary to the Act. Mr. Barnes shewed that the works complained of were commenced before the first of January last. Truth to say, the award of the referees on this matter was before us (every award comes before us), but having had occasion to comment on the proceedings of this gentleman, of "Lamb and Lion" notoriety, some time ago, we were led to delay noticing it. Suffice it to mention, the referees decided there was no ground for bringing the case before them, and marked their sense of the proceeding by making Mr. Badger pay the costs, 4*l.* 1*l.* 4*d.*

Another correspondent, in connection with the same neighbourhood, writes as follows:—

"6, Bath-terrace, Horsemonger-lane, Borough, Dec. 4, 1845.

SIR,—A friend of mine, a keeper of livery, stables on Blackheath, has had a sign-board (about 5 feet by 3 feet, and 1 inch thick), fixed against the front of his stables, with four iron holdfasts driven into the joints of the brick-work; for doing which, the district surveyor made a claim of 30*s.* My friend hesitated to pay him, after which he reduced the amount of his claim to 10*s.*, which was paid, and a receipt given for the amount. I shall feel obliged by your informing me, through your excellent journal, if the demand made by the surveyor was in accordance with the Buildings Act.—I am, Sir, &c.,

NICHOLAS METHRELL.

Now, this exorbitant demand was not only unwise; but, as it seems to us, perfectly unjustifiable. It is such conduct as this, on the part of a very few individuals, which is bringing the whole body, most undeservedly, into disrepute. The Act sets forth the height at which signs or notice-boards must be fixed, and involves the necessity of sending notice to the district surveyor before putting up such, that he may see the directions are complied with; but for a service like this, a merely nominal fee, if any, should be taken. For the inspection and removal of projections, which involves writing notice, &c., the Act allows the surveyor to demand 10*s.* For such services as that alluded to by Mr. Metherell, or for seeing, for example, that a chimney-pot above 4 feet high is properly fixed, half-a-crown would be ample. This might easily be put on a proper footing by the referees.

A few days ago, Mr. Geo. Porter, the surveyor for the district of Newington, summoned Mr. John Wilson, builder, of Southwark, before a magistrate, for having neglected to give him notice of having begun to resume operations in the building of certain dwelling-houses, after suspending the progress of such building for three calendar months, for which omission he was liable, under the provisions of the Act, to a penalty of 20*l.*

It appeared that, in the latter end of the year 1844, the defendant, Mr. Wilson, gave the necessary notices to Mr. Porter for the erection of five dwelling-houses in the front of Pownall-terrace, in the Kennington-road, and, in order to avoid the provisions of the new Act, had formed a foundation, and laid down a certain quantity of brickwork, before the new Act actually came into force. Mr. Porter, conceiving that the building was not in such a state, when the new Act came into force, as to take it out of its provisions, the matter was submitted to the official referees, who made an award in his favour. Instead, however, of following up the award of the referees, Mr. Porter thought proper to proceed against Mr. Wilson under that clause of the Act by which a builder is required, where the operation of a building is suspended for three calendar months, to give notice to the surveyor of his intention to recommence the building, as if he were about to commence a new building. Mr. Wilson, considering the building to be, under the operation of the old, and not the new Act, had neglected to give this notice. The summons was ultimately dismissed on a technical objection.

It seems to us, with all deference to Mr. Porter, that this mode of proceeding carried an arbitrary aspect: It could hardly be expected that the builder, while contending that the work did not come under the provisions of the new Act, would give a notice admitting its control. The course taken by Mr. Porter we are compelled to place in the list of those we have termed *unwise*.

Those correspondents who complain of district surveyors for objecting to materials or workmanship, must not expect the slightest sympathy from us without the fullest proof that the objections were capacious. On this head, and indeed in all cases where the interests of the public,—the actual purposes of the Act,—are really concerned, the district surveyors will no where find more strenuous support than in the pages of THE BUILDER. The office is a responsible one. It is not a sinecure,—a quiet provision for life in acknowledgment of the merit of the holder, as some of the new surveyors really seem to think it. The money they are to receive, is for services rendered,

and should they fail to perform these services disgrace will follow. The recent fall of three houses in Cavendish-place; Wandsworth-road, and its fatal results, with two or three similar disasters, particulars of which are now before us, and which are said to reflect in some degree on the district surveyors, may serve to illustrate this assertion. Still we do not allude to these particular accidents with any view of imputing blame, our information is at present insufficient, but merely to shew the responsibility of the office, and to induce a proper consideration for it on the part of the public, when duly discharged.

We may mention, relative to the revision of the Act, that several committees have been appointed out of doors to consider the subject. A committee of the vestry of St. Marylebone met at the court-house last week; Mr. H. Biers in the chair. They were attended by Mr. John White, the district surveyor of the parish, and Mr. Seace, the parochial surveyor, and having gone through, and commented upon various matters requiring revision, adjourned for the purpose of preparing a report, to be brought up to the vestry on an early day.

THE RESTORATION OF THE PARTHENON AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

THE model of the Parthenon, restored by Mr. R. C. Lucas, to which we alluded some months ago, is now completed, and has been recently purchased by the trustees of the British Museum for public exhibition in the Elgin room. It is on a large scale, being about nine feet in length, by six in width. The structure of the temple is executed chiefly in wood, the sculptures are modelled in a kind of wax. It is placed upon a lofty basement, so that the pediment is sufficiently above the eye to convey something like an idea of the perspective in which the original was viewed. The figures and groups are all modelled with the greatest care, either from the torsos brought by Lord Elgin from Greece, or still remaining there, or the drawings of Carrey made before the partial destruction of the Parthenon in 1687; those portions of the original design which have irretrievably perished, have been supplied by the promptings of Mr. Lucas's own powers of invention, aided by a most careful study of all that the extant remains of ancient art, and the research and sagacity of modern archaeology, could furnish, by way of authority and illustration. These diverse materials have been combined with extraordinary industry, ingenuity, and judgment by Mr. Lucas, and with the happiest result. The impression produced by the restored model, small as its scale is, is novel and imposing. A new world of art seems disclosed to us. For the first time we behold the true character of Greek architecture.

In northern climates and modern times, the Doric order has never really engaged our sympathies; its cold, normal beauty of structure has been authoritatively proclaimed the standard of faultless simplicity, and admired as such, but the untenanted pediments, and empty metopes impart to the mind an impression of cheerless and desolate monotony; all who felt thus, unconsciously recognized the truth, that such Doric architecture is a mere lifeless thing, a body from which the spirit which once animated it had left. When we look at the model of the Parthenon, all seems instinct with vitality.

The pediments are filled with majestic forms, so strangled, as, out of the utmost variety of attitude and grouping, to produce one great harmonious composition. Along the sides of the temple, standing out like jewels on a diadem, are the metopes; each presents an allusion to the mythic and primeval period of Athenian history, a passage, as it were, from a great national epic; some exploit of Pallas, of the deities of the soil, or of Theseus or other Athenian heroes; some sacred religious ceremony; or as in the metopes brought over by Lord Elgin, a great contest like that of the Centaurs and Lapithæ,